

252 days left in Paradise by Myley

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Summary: Hawkins, 1988, Senior year. Will Byers is the lonely queer of the school, constantly bullied and persecuted. One day however, he sees his routine brutally disturbed when his English teacher pairs him up for a project with Mike Wheeler, the heartthrob of the school to whom Will hasn't spoken in years and never stopped liking in secret.

252 days left in Paradise

Another day in Paradise Will thought as he looked at his reflection in the mirror. It wasn't a fancy reflection. Nape long brown hair, pale complexion, skinny body. Will wasn't exactly an athlete. With the years, he had learned not to care. He hated sports anyway. He sighed, looked at the calendar proudly pinned on the wall above his desk. Only 252 days before the end of the year. He could do it. He had already survived three years in this Hell people called High School. The senior year had proven to be the hardest yet, but he could do it. He gave himself the mental courage he needed, checked the box on the calendar. 251 days left. It was a small improvement and it made his heart leap in his chest.

He put his usual pair of jeans on with a light blue shirt, combed his hair a little. Not that it would make a difference in his everyday life. He wasn't going to impress anyone and he certainly didn't want to be seen too much. He already was a little too popular for his own taste. Being invisible was a privilege boys like him didn't have apparently.

He trotted down the stairs to the kitchen. The milk and cereal boxes already were on the table, ready for him.

"Hey kiddo!" his mother greeted him, ruffling his hair.

He smiled at her, took his usual seat and poured the cereal into the bowl.

"Any exciting class today?" she asked, sipping from her coffee, looking at her youngest with adoration.

Will shrugs, "I have gym this morning..."

"Ow, poor sweetie. It's gonna be ok."

He shrugged again, munched on his cereal without much enthusiasm.

He drove silently to school, following the usual path he took everyday, rock music playing on the radio, the only ok music station in Hawkins. He parked on his usual spot. It was easy to recognize,

covered in slurs and creative drawings of the worst taste. Will no longer paid attention to them anymore. 251 days left, he repeated in his head, giving himself more courage as the building of the school rose in his peripheral, bringing about that same amount of daily anxiety. He stopped riding his bike to school after they'd taken the wheels and left it half broken in the mud. Dustin had been nice enough to give him a ride, telling him to ignore them. It was easy to say for Dustin. Everything was easier for jocks.

He stopped the engine, checked his surrounding. There weren't too many kids. Hopefully, he would be able to walk to his class without too much damage. He took a deep sigh, prep-talked himself and walked out of the shelter of his car. Hands in pockets, head low not to be seen, he took hurried steps to the main gate, almost running to clear the distance between the classroom and himself faster.

His locker was easy to find too. It was yellow, adorned with the slogan "I suck cock" in huge pink letters and drawings of dicks everywhere. The words "Faggot locker", "Fag," "Fairyland," could also be seen between two sketches. Will used to clean his locker everyday. Now he no longer cared. They were written in permanent ink anyway. Joyce was furious when she found out and she demanded they be removed, going directly to the Principal's office. Mr Snigle, the principal, barely blinked at her, telling her her son should probably try to participate more in traditional boy's activities and be less of a cissy if he wanted to be respected. Joyce almost punched him and she ended up being dragged out of the school. Jim also tried to intervene, to no avail.

He took his books for his algebra class, looking straight at his locker, not making eye contact with anybody. He wasn't going to give them fuel to insult him again.

"Hey Byers!"

He turned to see Dustin walk to him, huge and imposing. Will smiled at him. When Dustin talked to him, no one dared attack.

"Hi Dustin," he replied softly.

"You didn't reply to my invitation man."

Will frowned, "Your invitation?"

"Yeah, my invitation for my upcoming Halloween party. I gave it to you last week. Remember?"

"Oh," Dustin's invitation. To a party. With loads of people. And Will, "Oh. The party. Yeah. No. Sorry Dustin, I won't be able to come."

Dustin's shoulders fell, his features expressing nothing but disappointment, "Oh come on, Will. It'll be fun."

Will took his last book that he piled on the two others, "Yeah I don't think so... Unless you want me to be the Piñata."

He walked past Dustin who followed him, "What are you afraid of? I'll protect you!"

Will stopped, turned to Dustin with a frown, his book secured under his arm, "I don't need protection."

"Then come," he joined his hands, bending to Will to be on his level and look him in the eye with the pleading sadness of a puppy, "Please."

Will rolled his eyes. He hated it when Dustin did that.

"It'll be fun, I promise Will."

Will doubted it. He doubted it very much. And if it was to be fun, it would be at his expense.

"I... I'll think about it..."

This seemed to cheer Dustin up whose face split in the biggest, brightest toothy smile.

"Awesome! There will be Lucas too and probably your sister and..."

Will cut him off, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, Dustin. I said I'll think about it."

Dustin's smile didn't disappear and he was still staring at Will with as much elation on his face as a Christmas tree. It made Will chuckle. It

was cute which was an odd thought considering Dustin had more of the bear than the seventeen year-old boy. He rolled his eyes, smirking in spite of himself. His attention was suddenly caught up by cheers from the other side of the hall. He frowned, his heart racing as he saw the one boy he did his best to avoid walk into view with the proud gait of a peacock, his groupies drooling behind him. Mike Wheeler. Will took a deep breath, forcing his thoughts off before his cheeks began to do something dangerous like blushing. The boy who had been by his side for most of his first years and whom he used to call his best friend. Now Mike and Will hadn't talked in almost three years. It was Mike who stopped talking and hanging out with Will. They all had, finding a hobby for themselves and a new group of friends. Only Dustin still socialized with him on a weekly basis. The others... Well... It wasn't exactly reputation healthy to hang out with the school fag and Will clearly had zero argument to counter their accusations. High School changed people like that. If you didn't blend it, you were destroyed.

Mike beamed at the girls, gorgeous in his jacket, his dark curls framing his cherub face perfectly. He was an odd contrast between boyish and girlish, a contrast that regularly earned Will black eyes but propelled Mike to the lover boy front scene. Will couldn't blame them. Mike was superb and it took all his restraint to keep that stupid crush buried within himself.

"Uhm, uhm..."

He blinked back into awkeness. Dustin was staring at him with a knowing look, wiggling his brow suggestively.

"Mike will be there too."

Will huffed, setting out on his way. He hated Dustin's implication. They made him feel awful about himself, obvious.

"Awesome..." he dismissed it, annoyed, ignoring Dustin who was cackling behind him.

The first two periods went smoothly. Will tried his hardest to stay focused on the class and not drift about things that clearly shouldn't be on his mind. Mike was just a few seats away from him. They didn't

share all classes but algebra, gym and English always were Mike centric hours for Will, gym being the worse for the most obvious reasons.

The hardest was to make sure Mike wouldn't notice anything. It wasn't very complicated. Will even doubted Mike saw him. Will's hand moved on its own, tracing the lines of Mike's face. He had drawn that face so many times, he no longer needed to focus or pay attention. It was all muscle memory.

He liked Mike's mouth the most. His beautiful mouth. Will would have lied if he said he never imagined what it'd feel like to kiss it. Not that it would ever happen. He yet had to kiss anyone seriously, his only experience being with the only girl he dated in eighth grade. The most awkward experience of his life. He stayed with Laura for two weeks before ending the relationship, realizing he had more emotion looking at pictures of Johnny Depp from 21st Jump Street than any girl in any magazine. It probably started the stain in his relationship with the former Party members.

He remembered how the others used to insist about girls and Will, poor Will, really had nothing to say but hum and shrug awkwardly.

He never truly admitted it to himself either, looked at boys, found them cute, forgot he ever had. It was easier this way. It didn't stop the boys to pester him about it though. Will never stared too long, always kept to himself but it was never enough for them.

The most embarrassing moments of the week were the restroom stops where he had to make sure no other boy was in the room with him unless he wanted to be called a freak even though he was just washing his hands. There also were the changing moments right before gym. Those were the worst. The boys never failed to make him feel like the most disgusting of perverts. It was something Will had trouble processing. Just because he was labelled "fag" now meant every penis owner was apparently a potential prey to his monstrous appetite. Will found it both insulting and outrageous. He certainly didn't care for the vast majority of them, penis owner or not. The only one who forced a stir in his heart was Mike and it wasn't just about his penis. Though, it still sometimes crossed his mind. The thought of Mike being Mike was enough.

He felt like one of his groupies, blushing at his every apparition, starving for a glimpse of him. The only difference being that Will had absolutely zero chance and that it was abnormal. Some guys already were rather suspicious of Will's shiny eyes whenever Mike was around, especially when he was half-naked and Will couldn't help but peak.

"Are you guys coming to Candice's party on Saturday?" one of the guys suddenly asked as they were all changing, Will secluded to his small corner, "She's doing it in her big mansion."

"There's not just her mansion that is big, if you see what I mean!"

One of the guys snorted, "Haha! Yeah! Can't be called Candice and not be a huge slut in my opinion!"

Will swallowed. He hated being alone with them, hearing them talk their sexist shit. It always made him feel awfully uncomfortable. It that was what being a man was, he wanted no part of it.

"I confirm," Mike said, smirking knowingly. It made Will gag.

"Wheeler! You banged her?"

"And not just once! She's a real ride. You can do everything to that bitch!" he winked.

Will's gag intensified. How could he have feelings for that guy? Mike's friends cheered. Will was so focused on being disgusted with the conversations he had been forced to hear that he failed to notice the danger on his right until it was too late. His eye caught sight of Mike removing his shirt, revealing his creamy chest. Will bit his lip, sensing the usual warmth color his cheeks. His heart sped up. He couldn't help but find him beautiful which did not go unnoticed by Mike's tribe of alpha idiots.

"Oh look," one of them said, pointing at Will, "The fag is blushing. Be careful Wheeler, seems like you have a fan!"

Will bit his lip in sudden embarrassment. He immediately retreated behind his locker in the corner, slipped his shirt over his skinny body in haste, trying his hardest to forget the image of Mike's athletic

torso. The guy, a brute called Larry, insisted, closing the locker so that he was visible to all again, making him feel like a squirrel caught by a herd of hyenas.

"What's the matter Byers? Don't you wanna suck his cock?"

"You want a free blowjob Wheeler?! I think he's offering!"

They all began to laugh. Will felt tears prick his eyes. He hadn't even wanted to look. Mike just happened to be in his periphery. From the corner of his eye, he saw Mike put on his white top, not even turning to look at them.

"Shut up Gabe. It's gross," he whispered.

"Oh come on man! Look at him! I'm sure he's dying inside to have your dick in his mouth! Aren't you little fairy?!"

Mike dismissed him, "Yeah I'll pass," he turned to his friend with a smirk, "But go ahead. You sound like you really, really want a ride!"

Gabe opened his mouth, offended.

"Shut your mouth! Don't say disgusting stuff like that. I'm not a fag!"

"Neither am I. So please, don't make assumptions," he winked, walking past them, not even sparing a glance at Will who wanted to disappear in a hole.

The scent of Mike's cologne hit him and he gasped in spite of himself, his heart racing in his chest in shame and unwanted enjoyment. He dared one glance toward the tall boy who was already disappearing in the stadium, absolutely not minding them.

"Freak," Gabe spat at him before joining his team.

They left Will alone in the changing room, his shirt and shorts hugging his scrawny body, fighting back the tears of humiliation that threatened to run down his face. School really wasn't the place to be emotional.

He tried to remain invisible for the biggest part of the class, forcing

his eyes down on his sketchbook, not on Mike who was playing just across. He was silly, really. This stupid crush would take him nowhere. Even when they were children and still friends, Will only felt pain at seeing Mike talk about girls and flirt with his sister. It didn't last with El and Will comforted Mike all night long. They were fourteen at the time. Their last year of friendship. After that, Will was alone. He had hoped that Mike would like him back, before he realized that what he was feeling wasn't ok for the people around him. He never thought there was anything remotely wrong in loving someone. Apparently, for the others there was. And Will watched Mike go with Charlene, Andrea, Julie, Beth and so many more, he'd forgotten their names.

"BYERS!" the teacher, Mrs Jacob, screeched in her whistle, "ON THE FIELD! NOW!"

Will sighed. There would be no cutting to it. He put his sketchbook away and dragged his feet down the stairs that led him to the place he hated most.

"White team," Mrs Jacob barked at him with her usual gentleness.

Everyone knew that she hated Will and she never missed an occasion to remind him. He took the white jersey from the pile, put it on and readied himself for another long game of Volleyball. He hated that sport.

Mrs Jacob whistled again. The game began. Will remained there, absolutely useless as bodies around him hurried to catch and throw. Two simple commands Will's brain and muscles were apparently unable to put in motion. He couldn't run, couldn't jump and always missed the ball. Fortunately, the kids were ignoring him, passing the ball to everyone in the team except him. He wasn't going to complain. His team scored twice. The opposite team, Mike's team, scored four times. They were faster, stronger. Will's eyes met Mike. His heart sped up again as it always did whenever he found himself near him. Mike's expression was neutral. He rose his hand and hit the ball effortlessly. Will sometimes wished he could have had such an agile body too. He felt clumsy and awkward, not entirely finished. It was already difficult to focus on a game but with Mike being so close, it was downright impossible. Feet moved rapidly, hands hit the ball

repeatedly. It went all too fast for Will who could reproduce anything he saw on paper as if it were a photography but couldn't have coordinated his hands to catch something for dear life.

Just out of nowhere, the ball hit him in the stomach. Hard. He winced, the air knocked out of him and fell on his knees, trying to breath. Mrs Jacob stopped the game.

"Travis," she said, "You're not supposed to hit the players. This isn't a game of dodgeball."

Travis, a tall lanky guy Will had never spoken to in two years, rose his hand in apology, ignoring Will. Mrs Jacob shake her hand, making no gesture to help Will however. The bell rang the end of the class. Around him the kids hurried to the changing rooms, impatient to finally eat. Will remained on his knees, his eyes burning with pain. He wanted to go home. He hated this place.

A hand suddenly appeared before him. He blinked, looked up, his heart missing a beat. Mike was staring at him, his hand reached to Will. There wasn't a single emotion on his face. Will swallowed, shy. He hesitated, looking for a potential trap, and took Mike's offered hand. It was warm, a bit clammy. Mike lifted him up back on his feet.

"Thanks," Will mumbled, not looking at him.

Mike shrugged, "No problem."

He walked past Will who stood there like a complete fool. It was the first time they had spoken in years.

He dressed back in haste, ignored the foul conversations around him, almost ignored Mike and headed to the cafeteria. He was hungry. The room was already packed with kids queuing with their tray. Will filled his with mashed potatoes and chicken wings before retreating to his usual eating spot. His friend, Matilda was already there.

"Hey Will!" she waved at him.

Will smiled, joining her. Matilda was his only friend. Like him, she was part of the unpopular kids of the school. She was cute, big blue eyes and cute little nose. But she wasn't a hot girl like his sister or

Candice who had the plastic of a porn star. Matilda was a small, plump girl with huge round glasses that ate most of her face. Obviously, this wasn't exactly a catch on among the boys of the school.

"How was your morning? I didn't see you."

Will sighed, playing with his fork, "Awful."

"I heard you were hurt in gym."

"Not really. I'm fine."

"They're all jerks. Ignore them."

"Yeah, I'm trying."

The sound of a laughter broke into the cafeteria. He turned his head to see Mike, his beautiful smile gracing his face. He was laughing to a joke one of his friends cracked. His smile always made Will want to die.

"Will," Matilda said softly, "Don't hurt yourself. He's not worth it."

Will shrugged. Matilda knew. She was the only who really knew.

"I can't help it. He's so beautiful."

She grimaced, "Not that beautiful. His nose looks funny. Crooked like a hawk. It's not sexy."

Will chuckled. It was always endearing, this habit of hers to try and cheer him up.

"It is to me."

She shook her head, finishing her meal. Will forced his eyes back on his plate, his ears strained to hear the slightest echo of Mike's voice.

English class was one of the few classes Will really enjoyed. His teacher Mrs Rosenberg was the most cultivated and interesting teacher he had ever had. She was also very open-minded, never

judging anyone, always trying to find the positive in each of her students.

They were currently working on the subtext. Lots of kids found it absolutely boring but Will thought it was fascinating.

He turned his attention back to the book they were studying, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

"Now," Mrs Rosenberg said, "Can you tell me why, in your opinion, this book was so controversial for its time?"

Hands rose in the air. Will didn't participate. He never did.

"Because it's gay?" Larry proposed with his usual smug arrogance.

Laughter accompanied the reply. Will's heart clenched in anger. Beside him, Matilda rolled her eyes. Mrs Rosenberg however dismissed him with a gentle smile.

"This isn't entirely wrong," she answered, "There is strong homoeroticism throughout the book which was seen as a moral offense by the Victorian society. But there is more to it."

Hands rose again. She picked one.

"Yes Anita?"

"I think this book is overrated," she stated.

Mrs Rosenberg raised her eyebrow, "Care to elaborate?"

"It's awfully sexist," she returned to the book and began to read, "My dear boy, no woman is a genius. Women are a decorative sex. They never have anything to say, but they say it charmingly. Women represent the triumph of matter over mind, just as men represent the triumph of mind over morals." How horrible is that? It's condescending and rude."

"The author was a fag. Of course he hated chicks!" Gabe mumbled.

"Gabe please, that is not a language I will tolerate in my class." Gabe

made a sign of peace with his hand but he didn't apologize. She turned to Anita again, "Lord Henry is a sexist man. But then again, he's a bitter man who desperately wants to live through Dorian's youth."

She walked to the middle of the room, stopped by Mike's side who was busy playing with his pen.

"What is Oscar Wilde's main criticism in this book? What is the main theme?"

There was a heavy silence in the room. Will knew the answer. He had read the book too.

"Social deception," Mike suddenly said, breaking the silence, "The guy does the most despicable things and never faces the consequences. He's a shallow narcissist and a liar," he had said it without even looking from his book.

Mrs Rosenberg nodded slowly, "Excellent Mike. That is absolutely true. Social amorality and social deception are the main themes of the book. It's about living a double life and lying to all, even to oneself. This trail of thoughts was inconceivable in Victorian society. It was unheard of."

She walked back to her desk. It was the end of the class.

"Now as some of you may remember, I mentioned a project I would like you to work on," she looked up at the class, "I want you to pick a book of your choice and present it to the class. I want it to be a book that rose controversy in its time. This will be a group project. You'll be paired up with someone."

The students began to chat among themselves, already choosing their partner. Will turned to Matilda who winked at him.

Mrs Rosenberg rose her hand to shush them, "Now, now, I will be designating the pairs," her answer brought about loud protests and indignation.

She produced a list, "I already have made them. Where would be the fun otherwise?!" she ignored the general discontentment and began

to read, "Anita with Jackson, Laurence with Henry, Joseph with Gabe, Travis with Larry, Matilda with Candice, Harvey and Tania, Judie and Bridget, Will with Mike, Stefan with Irina..."

She kept calling the names but Will could no longer hear, the words forming a distant background buzz. His brain had stopped working. Will with Mike. Will with Mike. Will with Mike...

This couldn't be happening.